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C O N F I D E N T I A L DJIBOUTI 000145

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DEPARTMENT FOR AF/E  
ROME, PARIS, LONDON FOR AFRICA WATCHER  
CJTF-HOA FOR POLAD

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TAGS: [PGOV](#) [PREL](#) [PHUM](#) [EAID](#) [ECON](#) [DJ](#)

SUBJECT: DJIBOUTI LEGISLATIVE ELECTIONS: NO SURPRISES

REF: DJIBOUTI 103

Classified By: PolOff Rebecca K. Hunter for reasons 1.4 (b) and (d)

**¶1.** (C) SUMMARY: As expected, Djibouti's February 8 elections uneventfully returned the ruling coalition, the "Union for a Presidential Majority" (UMP), to all sixty-five seats in Djibouti's unicameral legislature. Despite a boycott call from a rival coalition, the "Union for Democratic Alternation" (UAD), voter turnout was 72.6 percent, slightly higher than in the 2005 presidential elections. However, participation varied somewhat between Djibouti's six winner-take-all electoral districts. The lowest turnout was less than 65 percent in the Djibouti capital district, where roughly 9 percent of ballots cast were declared null or blank. Police and security forces were preventatively deployed throughout the country on election day, and no disturbances were reported. Teams from the African Union (AU), Organisation internationale pour la Francophonie (OIF) and Arab League observed the elections and have not reported any irregularities. END SUMMARY.

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PROVISIONAL RESULTS: NO SURPRISES  
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**¶2.** (U) Interior Minister Yacin Elmi Bouh announced provisional results and participation statistics on state-run television the afternoon of February 9. The UMP, a five-party coalition dominated by President Guelleh's Popular Rally for Progress (RPP), received 94 percent of the national vote and won all 65 National Assembly seats under Djibouti's winner-take-all system. The provisional results are expected to become final after examination by the National Independent Electoral Commission and official confirmation by the Constitutional Council.

**¶3.** (C) The UMP's 65 parliamentarians include twenty-two new candidates. That is the highest turnover to date in a legislative election. Two new female candidates joined the list, bringing the total number of women parliamentarians up to nine. The distribution of seats among native Afar, Somali, and Arabic speakers remains unchanged. A cabinet shuffle is widely expected, and may be announced in the weeks after the vote is officially confirmed.

**¶4.** (C) According to state-run media, total participation was 72.6 percent of Djibouti's 151,490 registered voters, roughly on a par with the 71.7 percent participation in the 2005 presidential elections, and much higher than the 48.4 percent turnout for the last legislative elections in 2003. However,

turnout varied among the six electoral regions, and participation in the district of Djibouti, which includes the capital city and the bulk of the population, was noticeably lower--63.8 percent according to the state-run media, and 65.8 percent according to the victorious UMP. Several Locally Engaged Staff (LES) who voted in Djibouti noted that participation seemed fairly low, with no lines to vote and few signatures on the voters' register. The percentage of blank or null ballots was also slightly higher in the district of Djibouti--9.34 percent according to the state-run media, or 7.67 percent according to the UMP. Nationally, only 5.9 percent of ballots cast were blank or null. (NOTE: While the higher number of blank ballots may indicate a protest vote, the UAD did actually call for its supporters to boycott elections entirely, rather than to cast a blank vote. END NOTE.)

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OPPOSITION BOYCOTTS; FAILS TO HOLD RALLY  
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¶ 15. (C) Unusually sharpening his rhetoric, UAD opposition leader Ismail Guedi had called for supporters to rally in Djibouti City on February 1 and February 6 to protest the electoral "masquerade" by the "dictatorial government." The GODJ banned both meetings under electoral laws which only permit candidates standing for current election to hold political events during a designated campaign period. According to the GODJ, since the UAD had already decided to boycott the elections, it was not eligible under the law to hold political meetings during the official campaign period. Heavy police presence at the proposed UAD rally sites forestalled any gatherings. Despite ratcheting up the tone of its attacks on Guelleh and his party, the UAD failed to draw supporters to its planned demonstrations. What is uncertain is whether this failure is due to lack of popular support for the UAD, or to the GODJ's actions to prevent the rallies.

¶ 16. (C) While the GODJ was rumored to have put several opposition leaders under house arrest for the duration of the elections, all three major opposition leaders appeared at Embassy Djibouti's national day celebration on February 7, the day before elections. Security on election day itself was tight, and no disturbances were reported.

¶ 17. (C) COMMENT: The relatively high reported voter turnout, if accurate, may reflect voter sentiment that Djibouti is better off today than when Guelleh was re-elected in 2005. However, rising food and fuel prices have certainly given ordinary Djiboutians cause for dissatisfaction with the status quo. For its part, the generally unorganized opposition presented no concrete platform or alternative political agenda, and its election boycott did not appear to gain traction. The relatively higher abstention in Djibouti city, along with more blank votes, may indicate a greater discontent in the capital with the paucity of electoral options than in the rest of the country. Djibouti's newly-elected parliamentarians will now have to address the issues of unemployment, inflation, and government services. END COMMENT.

SYMINGTON